

ABCs of the Holidays

Cut these pages out and tape or magnet them to your fridge or a mirror in your bathroom to begin and end each day with a plan to make the holidays magical!



A is for **Angels**. They are all around us throughout the year, yet they seem closer during this holiday season. Discuss guardian angels with your children, and perhaps create a small angel tree in your child's bedroom. Encourage him or her to name each angel, and then keep one on the nightstand to keep watch all year.



C is for **Christmas Cookies**, of course! Whether you purchase prepared sugar cookie dough or make your own, don't worry about the mess. Cookie cutters are available online, and you can find colored icing at your grocery store. Fill cute baggies tied with ribbon and share the cookies with neighbors and friends. Take pics for family!



B is for **Bells**. If we are lucky, the Salvation Army bells will be ringing this season throughout our city. Bells have a special place during the season, as they ring in churches and bell choirs. Try making a bell wreath. Simply Google "jingle bell wreath" and you'll find the easy steps. Hang them on doorknobs to ring out a festive jingle every time you open the door!



E is for **Santa's Elves**. That Elf on the Shelf may be a bit overdone, but you can still discuss how your children can be little elves and spread kindness wherever they go.



D is for **Dasher**. You know Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen, Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitzen. You know the rest. Have fun making reindeer and writing their names in glitter, then string them on your holiday mantle.



F is for **Fa La La La La, La La La La!** In 1944 Judy Garland sang this popular Christmas song in the movie *Meet Me in St. Louis*. The emotion of holiday music, old and new, is powerful. Play it, dance to it and let it bring the magic of Christmas into your home. Visit BrownieLocks.com to find fun Christmas carol trivia.

G is for **Good Will**. This year more than ever, we all need to bring good will to friends, family, neighbors and teachers. Make a list of activities you can do together to bring smiles, such as serving in a food kitchen, making cards to send to soldiers or bringing flowers to an elderly neighbor.



H is for **Holy**. No matter who we celebrate during this time, deem the season holy. All faiths hold reverence to a holy entity. Explain this to your children and discuss all religions. This encourages inclusion, an open mind and worldly attitude.

I is for **Icicles**. In our region, winter brings many opportunities to sled, ski and ice skate. And those icicles can at times shimmer in the sunlight. If you see one in a safe and opportune locale, break it off and look at the clear beauty. Discuss how icicles form and then melt.



J is for **Jolly**. The legend of jolly old St. Nick can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk named St. Nicholas, believed to be born sometime around 280 A.D. in Patara, near Myra in modern-day Turkey. He was admired for his piety and kindness, and it's said he gave away all his inherited wealth and traveled the countryside helping the poor and sick. The name Santa Claus evolved from Nick's Dutch nickname, *Sinter Klaas*, a shortened form of *Sint Nikolaas*, which is Dutch for Saint Nicholas. Food for thought!



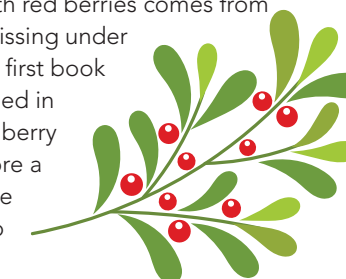
K is for **King**. Many kings are a part of the season, including the three kings that came bearing gifts for baby Jesus, who as an infant was born a King. Setting up a manger scene can be a tradition your children will carry with them throughout their lives. When I was a child, my mother always gave me the opportunity to set up the straw and wooden manger scene in our home. My aunt gave me a lovely porcelain manger scene for Christmas one year, and I treasure it to this day. The kings, the animals, the baby and the shepherds all have their place!



L is for **Lights**. Be creative! There are so many options to put on a Griswold-worthy show around your home. Involve the children so they feel a part of the fun.



M is for **Mistletoe**. Who hasn't kissed under the mistletoe? The custom of kissing under this pretty, bright green sprig with red berries comes from England. There was kissing under the mistletoe in the illustration in the first book version of *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843. The original custom was that a berry had to be picked from the sprig before a person could be kissed, and when the berries were gone, there could be no more kissing!





N is for **New Year**. We will all look to 2021 with hopeful hearts for a better year! Make this a festive occasion at home with feasting on crab legs, hotdogs, tacos or homemade soup. Whatever you serve, this night will be remembered.



O is for **"Oh Holy Night."** The songs of the season always call up memories for each of us. Begin your own holiday tradition by introducing your children to these classic goosebump-raising melodic masterpieces!



V is for **Vacation**. Go away from home—if even to a local hotel—for a day. Your children will enjoy the holiday decorations and staying in a different room for a change. Many local places are now offering reduced rates, and you can go over the river and through the woods for a brief reprieve!

U is for **Uncles, Aunts and Grandparents!** With luck, family will be able to visit and stay for the holidays in your home, or you will visit them. Make sure you have your children spend time with them and listen closely to their stories.



W is for **Wassail**. This warm apple drink dates back to another tradition in England, when villagers would go door to door in their neighborhood wassailing, which meant offering the hot mulled cider to neighbors and singing carols. Also, they would go to orchards and sing to ensure a good apple harvest come spring.



P is for **Poinsettia**. These bright red leaves offer a splash of color to frigid winter, and the story of why they are the Christmas flower, said to come from an old Mexican legend, is so sweet! A young girl named Pepita was sad that she didn't have a gift to leave for baby Jesus at Christmas Eve services. Her cousin tried to comfort her and said that Jesus would love any present, no matter how small. With no money to buy a gift, Pepita picked a bouquet of weeds that she walked past on the way to church. When she got there, she left the weeds at the bottom of the Nativity scene. Suddenly, the weeds transformed into beautiful red flowers.



Q is for **Quality Time**. Obviously, everyone has been at home many more days and hours than usual. Even so, this time can be a bit more "homey" with the right attitude and ambiance. Draw from your own memories to create a holiday home, filled with love and togetherness.

X is for **eXercise!** Keep the blood flowing and mood up by exercising throughout this season of eating treats and snuggling with popcorn and hot chocolate.



R is for **Rudolph**. What is the holiday season without this classic? Plan to pop popcorn, light the fireplace and snuggle under fuzzy blankets as you enjoy this sweet show. Its timeless message of inclusion and accepting differences never goes out of style. Rudolph, "the most famous reindeer of all," was born more than a hundred years after his eight flying counterparts. The red-nosed wonder was the creation of Robert L. May, a copywriter at the Montgomery Ward department store. In 1939, he wrote a Christmas-themed story-poem to help bring holiday traffic into his store.

S is for **The Sound of Music**, the iconic movie. Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woollen mittens, brown paper packages tied up with strings, these are a few of my favorite things! Begin a holiday family tradition with this delightful film. When Christopher Plummer sings "Edelweiss," I'm reminded of a music box that played this tune that my father gave me when I was a little girl.



Y is for **Yule**. Discuss the history of the yule log, which is a custom from years past that involves selecting a log to burn on Christmas Eve. It is also a delicious recipe you can find online.



Z is for **Zoey!** Rudolph's girlfriend in the 1998 animated movie *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. She sings the sweet song "There's always Tomorrow." Google it and play the uplifting tune!



T is for **Tradition**. We all have traditions from the holidays, like the way we hang our stockings or light our Menorah, the special corn casserole our grandmother made or the ribs our grandfather smoked. Discuss what tradition your family will make and then keep it every year!



An avid outdoors girl, Judy Goppert lives in Lee's Summit. She enjoys drawing on her personal experiences to write about the nuances of everything wonderful about life.